

# The Paradox of Policy Analysis: If It Is Not Used, Why Do We Produce So Much of It?

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## **Abstract**

*This article explores the apparent paradox that our society invests heavily in policy analysis when empirical studies, political science theory, and common wisdom all suggest that analysis is not used by policymakers to make better policy decisions. It offers a critique of the traditional view of policy analysis and presents an alternative view derived from contemporary literature on the policy process and decisionmaking. The alternative view suggests that there are legitimate uses for analysis other than the problem-solving use originally envisioned but apparently rarely attained. The two views imply different patterns of use of analysis by legislative committees—a contrast that I subject to an empirical test. An examination of quantitative data on policy analysis use by congressional committees from 1985 to 1994 lends support for the alternative view. The research has two implications. First, despite its scientific origins, policy analysis may be a more effective instrument of the democratic process than of the problem-solving process. Second, the profession of policy analysis may be in better shape than many who are calling for fundamental changes to its practice seem to believe. © 1999 by the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

There is an apparent paradox in our society: We invest tremendous resources in policy analysis, yet common wisdom, political science theory, and years of empirical research suggest that analysis is not used by policymakers to make better policy. Legislatures, in particular, have been shown to be particularly impervious to policy analysis [Davidson, 1976; Jones, 1976; Mooney, 1991; Robinson, 1989; Weiss, 1989; Whiteman, 1985], yet a vast amount of analysis makes its way to legislative committees. This article offers a theoretical basis for resolving the paradox and tests the theoretical claim with data on policy analysis use by congressional committees from 1985 to 1994.

To shed light on this paradox, I suggest a fundamental redefinition of policy analysis and its use in a legislative environment. I argue that the rationalist foundation of traditional policy analysis unduly limits our understanding of policy analysis and its

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role in the policymaking process. Traditionalists view analysis as a tool for choosing among alternatives in an effort to solve problems. Failure to substantiate widespread use of this kind has led to despair about the future of the profession [Kirp, 1992] and has generated suggestions for major changes in its practice [DeLeon, 1997; Durning, 1993; White, 1994]. In my view, policy analysis is more a tool of the democratic process than the problem-solving process. Its value lies in its contribution to the understandings that citizens have of issues and the political process. These understandings can profoundly affect policy outcomes and popular support for those outcomes. Analysis can lead to better policies if by “better” we mean more responsive to, and supported by, the public.

My analysis of congressional committee use of policy analysis indicates that policy analysis may, in fact, be used in a manner consistent with this alternative definition. The principal implication of the research is that the policy analysis profession may not need a major overhaul, as some have suggested, but may simply need to be evaluated by a more appropriate standard.

## THE PARADOX

The last two decades have seen tremendous growth in the policy analysis profession. Policy jobs have proliferated at all levels and branches of government as well as outside government, policy journals and professional organizations have been established, and graduate education in public policy has expanded dramatically. The rapid growth has made policy analysis “one of the established knowledge industries in late twentieth century America” [Dunn, 1994, p. 50].

Paradoxically, this investment has occurred without evidence that policy analysis makes a significant contribution to the solution of policy problems. To the contrary, there is substantial documentation that analysis is not used by policymakers to solve problems or even to choose among alternatives in the design of public policies [Booth, 1990; Caplan, 1975; Mooney, 1991; Webber, 1984, 1986; Weiss, 1977a, 1977b; Weiss and Bucuvalas, 1980; Whiteman, 1985]. More disheartening are the empirical findings on policy analysis use within legislatures. Strategic and conceptual, rather than substantive and concrete, use is more common [Whiteman, 1985, 1995] and insider information, rather than outside expertise, is reported to be more useful [Mooney, 1991]. Despite the tremendous information resources at the disposal of Congress, use of policy analysis falls well short of most people’s expectations [Davidson, 1976; Frye, 1976; Haveman, 1976; Jones, 1976; Robinson, 1989; Verdier, 1989; Weiss, 1989]. The overlapping system of committee jurisdictions militates against use of analysis by fragmenting the attention given to a single policy issue [Davidson, 1976; Frye, 1976; Weiss, 1989]. A focus on the costs and benefits of policy measures to society as a whole “answers questions that few legislative policymakers are interested in either asking or having asked” [Haveman, 1976, p. 247]. Written analysis is unsuited to legislators, who “read people,” not reports [Weiss, 1989, p. 414] and is only one of many sources of information competing for attention [Whiteman, 1995]. Whiteman, in fact, found that the more salient an issue is to constituents, the less analytical information is used.

The theoretical literature on legislative decisionmaking is equally discouraging. Distributive theory, in both its original and institutional variants, holds that legislators have little use for substantive information that relates policies to their probable outcomes in society. Legislators are rewarded for their positions, not for the policy outcomes that result from their positions [Ferejohn, 1986; Mayhew, 1974; Shepsle, 1986; Shepsle and Weingast, 1987, 1994]. Members require political information about

other legislators' positions and strategies [Austen-Smith, 1990; Cox and McCubbins, 1994; Lupia and McCubbins, 1994; Shepsle and Weingast, 1994], not substantive information about how policy will affect social welfare.

The policy process literature is no more hopeful than the political science literature. Kingdon [1995] claims that problems and solutions follow different chronologies. If solutions are attached to problems, it is largely fortuitous. If information has an impact on policy outcomes, it does so only over the long term. Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith [1993] argue that policymakers' core beliefs are unaffected by policy information and that major policy change results from external factors, such as inflation and elections, not from ideas and analysis.

What explains this paradox? Why do we invest so heavily in analysis, lacking evidence that it makes any difference in solving our myriad policy problems? Why do legislators request more policy analysis than they can digest while reporting that "political" and "insider" information is far more valuable? Why do interest groups and think tanks bombard legislators with policy reports that are not read? Is this investment misguided or is policy analysis used in some other, as yet undocumented, way that sustains and justifies the policy analysis industry?

#### TRADITIONAL AND INTERPRETIVE VIEWS CONTRASTED

The key to resolving the paradox may rest with embracing an alternative conception of policy analysis based on a more contemporary set of theoretical premises. A number of premises underlies the discipline and practice of policy analysis. These can be traced to the discipline's formative years, which coincided with the ascendancy of welfare economics, rational choice theory, and incremental understandings of the policy process. Traditional policy analysis presumes that experts trained in proper analytical techniques can apply them systematically to the political marketplace, can discover and measure the impact of policy on citizen interests, can project policy consequences with some accuracy, and can affect the decisions of identifiable clients, who will use the analysis to solve policy problems. It is an optimistic view that reflects the positivism of the social sciences that form the core of its interdisciplinary approach. It is driven as well by the "stages" view of policymaking in which one of the final states is a timely recommendation to a client.<sup>1</sup>

The client orientation, I believe, emerged naturally from the prevailing view of policymaking as relatively orderly, in contrast to today's emphasis on the more dynamic aspects of the process. Analysis is viewed as advice to a client, rather than as a contribution to a broader political discourse, and its usefulness is assessed as its contribution to eventual decisions or actions by policymakers.

I suggest an alternative, "interpretive" view of policy analysis, with a different theoretical bent leading to a very different notion of "use."<sup>2</sup> The differences are

<sup>1</sup> Public policy schools typically present a linear problem-solving paradigm ending with a recommendation to a client. In one of the first books to describe the role of the policy analyst, Meltsner [1976] writes, "Whether he knows it or not, every analyst needs a client. Without a supportive client, his work will not be used. . . ." (p. 5). More recently, policy analysis was defined as "client-oriented advice relevant to public decisions" [Weimer and Vining, 1989, p. 1].

<sup>2</sup> My use of "interpretation" as an important concept in information use is not new [Feldman and March, 1981; Smith, 1984]. Durning [1993] identifies four classes of changes needed to address perceived shortcomings of traditional policy analysis. One—"interpretative participatory policy analysis"—asks the analyst to seek input from citizens. My approach is *descriptive*, not prescriptive, based on contemporary understandings of the policy process.

**Table 1.** Premises of policy analysis: traditional versus interpretive view.

	Traditional	Decisionmaking
Decisionmaking	Rational choice: decisionmakers set goals and maximize utility by choosing best means; prospective rationality; problems can be solved by systematic thinking	Ambiguous goals, uncertain means; decisions not primarily about projecting consequences but about process and organizational legitimacy; retrospective rationality
Politics	Marketplace of preference satisfaction; struggle over whose interests are best met by policies (costs, benefits); aggregate of individual interest = public interest	Polity: collective social struggle to shape issue interpretations and preferences about the public interest; debate and discourse can lead to learning
Information	Objective, ideally conclusive, useful problem-solving tool; reduces uncertainty about the relation between policies and outcomes	Inherently inconclusive; reflects values; partisan; information frames understandings of problems; cause-effect in social/political world is indeterminate
Public opinion	Inattentive, politically unsophisticated citizens whose interests can best be conveyed to policymakers by experts	Potentially attentive and capable citizens who mobilize around issue "frames," to whom policymakers pay attention
Policy process	Linear, stages, subgovernments; decisionmakers and experts; passive citizens; monopoly jurisdictions; incremental change	Nonlinear; constant battle over agenda; politics of ideas; competition over jurisdiction and issue interpretations; dynamic change
Use of policy analysis	Instrument of problem-solving process; used by client or decisionmaker to help make choices among competing policies	Instrument of democratic process; used by policymakers, interest groups, and citizens to interpret issues, discover public interest, and justify actions; symbol of rational decisionmaking

outlined in Table 1. Building on newer scholarship stressing uncertainty in decisionmaking [Cohen, March, and Olsen, 1972; Dryzek, 1993, Kingdon, 1984, March and Olsen, 1976, 1989], the social aspects of politics [Dryzek, 1990; Hill, 1992; Stone, 1997], the framing contributions of information to the mobilization of political interests [Jones, 1994; Neuman, 1986; Popkin, 1991; Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock, 1991; Stone, 1997], and the competition among committees for jurisdiction [King, 1997], I propose that policy analysis is used in three ways not validated by the traditional view: (a) as language for framing political discourse, (b) as legitimate rationalization for legislative action where prospective rationality is inhibited by "garbage can" decision environments, and (c) as a symbol of legitimate decision processes that can increase support for governance processes in a society that values rationality. Although this kind of use is not what policy analysts might hope for, it is neither a trivial nor illegitimate use of information resources.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND FINDINGS

Is policy analysis a tool for problem solving or a weapon in the battle to shape debate, claim jurisdiction, and gain public approval of legislative activity? The research design I employ to investigate this question focuses on two variables that can help us distinguish between the traditional and the interpretive views—committee jurisdiction and the degree of public attention to policy issues.

### Committee Jurisdiction

Committees are the arenas for discussion of the merits and substance of most legislation and the place where policy analysis and other research information is most likely to be considered. Traditional views of policymaking were founded upon monopoly committee jurisdictions. Each committee had its own policy area, which provided opportunities for specialization or logrolling. Prior to the 1974 reforms, committees did technically have monopoly over jurisdictions because bills were referred to a single committee. However, complex legislation increasingly strained the definitions of jurisdiction. The 1974 congressional reforms allowed three types of multiple referral—joint, split, and sequential. Over the next 20 years, multiple referrals were used with growing frequency [King, 1997].<sup>3</sup> Newer scholarship has focused on jurisdictional competition, in light of the fluidity of jurisdictions and the multidimensionality of most policy issues [Jones, Baumgartner, and Talbert, 1993; King, 1997]. This scholarship on congressional committees complements scholarship on the policy process that stresses the importance of framing and issue definition in the evolution of policy [Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Jones, 1994; Rochefort and Cobb, 1994].

The interpretive view of policy analysis, which I derive from these newer understandings of the legislative and policy processes, suggests that committees would have a greater need for policy analysis when they face greater jurisdictional competition, because of the value of information in framing and interpreting issues advantageously. This leads to my first hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1:* Policy analysis use by committees is greater in cases of jurisdictional competition than in cases of jurisdictional monopoly.

If policy analysis is used in the battle among committees to frame issues and claim jurisdiction, there should be greater use of policy analysis when committees are competing for jurisdiction. If policy analysis is used as a problem-solving tool, there might actually be less use of analysis with jurisdictional competition because no single committee would be in a position to approach the issue comprehensively. There is no reason, from the traditional perspective, to expect that use of policy analysis would increase as jurisdictional competition increases. Confirmation of this hypothesis would lend support to the interpretive view.

### Measuring Jurisdictional Competition

I measure jurisdictional competition in two ways. One is specific to each case; the other is a contextual measure of each committee's jurisdictional environment. For the first, I use dummy variables to classify cases according to the five referral situations, because each situation carries different implications for the nature of the jurisdictional competition. These five referral situations are:

<sup>3</sup> The 1995 reforms severely limited the use of multiple referrals.

**Table 2.** Likely continuum of jurisdictional competition by type of referral.

Type of referral	Level of competition	Reason
Split	Low	Provisions of the bill have been divided; committees are considering different titles
Sequential—secondary	Low	Committee has little reason to invest resources in issue definition battle because primary committee has already reported the bill
Single <sup>a</sup>	Middle (average of high and low)	Most single referrals are “potentially sequential” with committee having incentive to use information to fend off further referral; the remainder are single dimensional bills where competition is absent
Joint	Middle	Multiple committees consider the whole bill, but practice is to limit committees to issues within their established domain, diminishing the level of competition among committees
Sequential—primary	High	All are cases of a multidimensional bill where committee has incentive to frame issues to prevent sequential referral or at least put its mark on bill before it is referred onward

<sup>a</sup> An ideal research design would set up separate categories for these two types of single-referral situations, one of which would be predicted to exhibit low competition and the other high. Determining the dimensionality of each issue is, however, beyond the scope of this study.

- Single referrals, where the bill goes to one committee only
- Split referrals, where the bill is divided, with separate parts going to different committees but no shared responsibility for reviewing the same provisions<sup>4</sup>
- Joint referrals, where the whole bill is referred simultaneously to more than one committee<sup>5</sup>
- The first committee in what ultimately becomes a sequential referral
- A secondary committee in a sequential referral

<sup>4</sup> As King [1997] explains, split referrals have become very rare, as joint referrals have increasingly been made with attention to respecting committee jurisdictional boundaries (p. 102).

<sup>5</sup> The 1995 Gingrich reforms eliminated joint referrals, replacing them with a modified type of sequential referral, but that was after the period studied in this research.

King's recent, detailed study of congressional committee strategies to claim jurisdiction over policy areas and specific legislation helps us understand that these different cases might fall along a continuum of jurisdictional competitiveness [King, 1997]. Table 2 displays the five different referral situations and the associated level of competition. The two somewhat counterintuitive findings from King's research are that most singly referred bills are "potentially sequential" (that is, not clearly within one committee's jurisdiction) and that jointly referred bills are monitored by committee "border cops" to minimize the degree to which committees deliberate on the same issues (p. 102).

The second measure of jurisdictional competitiveness is a contextual variable that measures the percentage of each committee's referrals, which were referred to other committees as well, in a given two-year session. For example, if 400 bills were referred to the House Judiciary Committee in the 103rd Congress, and 200 of those bills were also referred to other committees (excluding the House Rules Committee), the measure of jurisdictional competitiveness for the House Judiciary Committee in the 103rd Congress would be 0.50. The higher the measure, the more the committee shares jurisdiction with other committees and, according to interpretive theory, the more the committee would use policy analysis to help in the competition over issue definition and jurisdictional venue.

### Public Attentiveness to Issues

*Hypothesis 2:* Policy analysis use by committees is greater when public attention to issues is high.

If legislators use policy analysis to explain their actions and seek constituency approval for legislative processes, then we should find greater use when legislators need to be concerned with public opinion. It could be argued that legislators using policy analysis in the effort to solve problems would likewise use more analysis when public attention is high. However, Table 1 reminds us that in the traditional view, analysis is conclusive—it actually reduces uncertainty about the impact of policies and facilitates decisionmaking. So, from the traditional perspective, we might expect legislators to spend more time reviewing studies or to obtain information more quickly, when public attention is high. We would not necessarily expect them to refer to a greater number of studies. In fact, one problem that politicians have with academic research is that studies so often contradict one another, impeding problem resolution.

### Measuring Public Attentiveness

My operationalization of the public attentiveness variable is based on studies by Baumgartner and Jones [1993] and Jones [1994] of the dynamics of policy change. They have found that when jurisdictional monopoly prevails for a particular issue area, that area will be characterized by "subgovernment politics." Political activity will be dominated by those narrow interests most directly affected. Other interest groups and the general public will be inattentive to these policy issues. Consequently, legislators need be concerned about appealing for public support of their actions primarily when jurisdictional competition is present. When this condition is satisfied, *and* when the policy issue under consideration is salient, as measured by its coverage in the popular press, the public should be most

<sup>6</sup>The newspapers are *The New York Times*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Christian Science Monitor*.

attentive to their legislators' actions. I measure issue salience as the number of articles published in a database of seven newsarticles<sup>6</sup> on the subject of the bill during the six-month period up to the publication of the committee report. The resulting interaction between jurisdictional competition and issue salience measures the degree of public attention to the bill at hand.

### The Dependent Variable—Use of Policy Analysis

The interpretive view suggests to me that the use of policy analysis is positively affected by the two independent variables described earlier: jurisdictional competition and public attentiveness. I introduce a novel measure of the use of policy analysis. I count the number of citations of analytic reports in the “committee reports” filed by committees after consideration and often after amendment of bills.<sup>7</sup> These reports are a rich source of evidence of “use” in accordance with the interpretive definition. A wide variety of studies and other analytical information is available to committee members and their staffs as a result of testimony and materials submitted to the committee. Committee reports include sections, often quite extensive, describing the information presented to the committee and explaining how it was considered by the committee to be relevant to its actions.

Committee reports are written by committee staff, approved by the staff director and the committee chair, and subject to review by members of the committee. The reports follow standard formats across all committees because their structure is governed by a House Rule.<sup>8</sup> The sections of the reports where citations of policy analysis are typically found are “purpose and summary,” “background and need for legislation,” “committee consideration,” and “additional, supplemental, and dissenting views.” The fact that policy analysis is frequently cited in the latter section validates the committee report as a measure of policy analysis use in the interpretive sense: Members use the report to justify their actions. Their comments include explanations of why they voted against a measure or why they voted for a measure even though they had reservations. References to policy analysis in committee reports take many forms. Consequently, I developed rules for counting references to ensure consistency across cases. My principal aim was to count each reference to a report, study, or other published analysis in which the committee report cites a substantive point. The same report is counted more than once in a committee report if it is cited with reference to different aspects of the committee’s consideration of the issue or if it is cited once in the main body of the report and again in a dissenting opinion at the end of the report. Multiple references to the same report must be counted because I am tracking not simply the number of studies at the disposal of the committee but the instances in which the content of those studies was found relevant to the committee’s deliberation and committee members’ interests. I make no judgment of quality or objectivity of the cited research, consistent with the interpretive theory premise that policy analysis necessarily reflects values. Table A.1 displays the use of analysis in one committee report. Each entry in the table counts as one instance of use by the committee.

<sup>7</sup> Reports are filed only when a committee completes action and “reports” out the bill.

<sup>8</sup> The one exception is the House Ways and Means Committee, whose reports tended to follow a different format that was long on descriptions of proposed law changes and short on explanations of the need for legislation or the reasoning of the committee. For this reason, I include a dummy variable for Ways and Means cases.

## Control Variables

### *Committee Specialization*

Highly specialized committees should be more familiar with experts and policy research. A control for committee specialization avoids confusing increased use of policy analysis with increased ability to find it. I construct a measure of committee specialization that reflects individual member experience sponsoring legislation in the relevant subject area.<sup>9</sup> I compute the percentage of all of the bills authored by committee members during the two-year session that were referred to that same committee. For example, of the 509 bills authored by members of the House Agriculture Committee in the 100th Congress, 147 were referred to the House Agriculture Committee. The specialization measure for House Agriculture that session is 0.289, indicating that nearly 30 percent of committee member bill sponsorship involves agricultural issues.

### *Other Controls*

I control for any impact the party of a bill's sponsor might have on the introduction of information during hearings. Bills sponsored by Republicans (the House was controlled by Democrats for all of the years of the study) may have received less genuine consideration and study. For similar reasons, I distinguish the 103rd Congress (Democratic president) from the 99th through 102nd (Republican president). In the four congresses with divided government, Democratic committee chairpeople may have been less receptive to expert testimony and materials submitted by the executive branch than they were in the 103rd Congress. Finally, I control for the unique characteristic of Ways and Means committee reports. These are organized differently than all of the others, de-emphasizing the sections that report the use of information and focusing on technical explanations of proposed provisions versus existing law.

### *Case Selection*

I offer data on the use of policy analysis by committees of the House of Representatives from 1985 to 1994. The unit of analysis is the committee-bill pair. Each House committee to which a particular bill is referred is a separate case, provided the committee "reported out" the bill by submitting a written committee report to the floor. In selecting cases, I control for the availability of policy analysis, over time and across cases, so that findings of policy analysis use are not biased toward those cases where more policy analysis is available. By the mid-1980s the profession of policy analysis was well established. There should be no systematic variation in the availability of policy analysis across the selected time period, 1985 to 1994. To control for systematic variation across cases, I use only bills identified in the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* as the subjects of "key votes." The *Almanac* identifies sixteen votes each year as "key" House votes. I assume that key votes occur with respect to major policy issues for which there is a reasonable pool of available research.

I select all domestic policy bills during the 10-year period that are subjects of the key votes, excluding resolutions, bills that originated in the Senate, and appropriations and budget reconciliation bills. Fifty-one bills meet these criteria. These bills entailed 129 committee referrals

<sup>9</sup> Krehbiel [1991], in his work on the impact of specialization on legislative organizations, measures specialization by committee seniority. I believe a member becomes a specialist by engaging in legislative work in a particular area, not just by accruing years of service.

**Table 3.** Profiles of committee use of policy analysis ranked by average number of citations per case.

Committee	Number of cases	Total number of citations	Average number of citations	Congress <sup>a</sup>	U.S. General Accounting Office	Federal	University <sup>b</sup>	Task force <sup>c</sup>	Other <sup>d</sup>
Science, Space, and Technology	3	68	23	24	1	24	1	6	12
Agriculture	6	130	22	28	24	30	5	35	8
Energy and Commerce	14	282	20	29	43	106	6	3	95
Education and Labor	10	163	16	16	39	27	15	9	57
Banking, Finance, Urban Affairs	7	80	11	10	48	9	2	3	8
Judiciary	17	170	10	2	9	38	3	16	102
House Administration	3	22	7	3	0	14	0	0	5
Foreign Affairs	3	18	6	1	3	10	0	1	3
Interior/Natural Resources	6	37	6	4	9	8	0	0	16

<sup>a</sup> Includes Congressional Budget Office, Congressional Research Service, Office of Technology Assessment, and committee and subcommittee reports.  
<sup>b</sup> All citations that identified author by university affiliation, including law review articles.  
<sup>c</sup> Includes federal-level task forces, commissions, and panels.  
<sup>d</sup> Includes industry groups, independent research or consulting firms, scholarly books and articles, state and local agencies, and sources without sufficient citation information to place in another specific category.

**Table 3.** Continued.

Committee	Number of cases	Total number of citations	Average number of citations	Congress <sup>a</sup>	U.S. General Accounting Office	Federal	University <sup>b</sup>	Task force <sup>c</sup>	Other <sup>d</sup>
Ways and Means	18	101	6	8	16	63	0	4	10
Merchant Marine and Fisheries	6	28	5	6	8	7	0	0	7
Post Office and Civil Service	2	9	5	4	0	0	2	0	3
Government Operations	4	12	3	2	1	8	1	0	0
Public Works and Transportation	5	9	2	2	0	6	0	0	1
Armed Services	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	105	1129	11	139	201	350	35	77	327

<sup>a</sup> Includes Congressional Budget Office, Congressional Research Service, Office of Technology Assessment, and committee and subcommittee reports.

<sup>b</sup> All citations that identified author by university affiliation, including law review articles.

<sup>c</sup> Includes federal-level task forces, commissions, and panels.

<sup>d</sup> Includes industry groups, independent research or consulting firms, scholarly books and articles, state and local agencies, and sources without sufficient citation information to place in another specific category.

(excluding referrals to the House Rules Committee and to all Senate committees), and resulted in 105 committee reports. Fifteen different committees of the House are represented in the data.

**Results**

Table 3 summarizes the amount and source of citations of policy analysis in the committee reports. It shows that there was a substantial amount of citation of analytic reports—more on the average by some committees than by others. It shows, as well, that federal government sources were the most heavily cited and that the General Accounting Office and congressional sources were also heavily cited. The ranking of committees by average number of citations per report masks the high variability *within* committees of the use of analysis. For example, the committee with the highest average use, Science, Space, and Technology, cited no analytic reports for one of its three cases. Similarly, the Judiciary Committee (also a fairly high user of analysis) cited no analytic reports in 6 of its 17 cases, but cited reports 72 times in 1 case. My point is that there is no direct correlation between committee (and therefore policy area) and use of analysis. Instead, the important source of systematic variation appears in the level of jurisdictional competition, which is the subject of my research design.

**Table 4.** The significance of jurisdictional competition and public attentiveness in predicting use of policy information (*N* = 105).

Test Variables	Coefficient	<i>t</i> -value
Jurisdictional competition	36.50	1.82**
Referral type = single	-12.72	-2.26
Referral type = split	-24.17	-2.248***
Referral type = joint	-11.09	-2.03**
Referral type = sequential—secondary	-21.84	-4.01***
Public attentiveness	0.01	1.33*
Control Variables		
Bill sponsored by Democrat	6.36	0.81
Unified government (1993–1994)	-1.59	-0.36
Specialization	26.13	1.65**
Ways and Means Committee	-8.64	-1.26*
Constant	-5.15	-0.41
R-Square	0.23	

\* Statistically significant at the 10-percent level.  
 \*\* Statistically significant at the 5-percent level.  
 \*\*\* Statistically significant at the 1-percent level.

**Table 5.** Use of policy analysis varies by type of referral (findings from 105 cases).

Referral Type	Average number of citations of analysis in a committee report
Sequential—first	24.6
Joint	13.6
Single	11.0
Sequential—secondary	4.3
Split	2.7

**Table 6.** Public attentiveness: the interaction of competition and salience—more policy analysis is used when public attentiveness is high (values in box are average number of citations of policy analysis per case).

	Low jurisdictional competition <sup>a</sup>	High jurisdictional competition <sup>b</sup>
Low salience <sup>a</sup>	Low public attentiveness <i>n</i> = 33                      9.45	<i>n</i> = 22                      10.41
High salience <sup>b</sup>	<i>n</i> = 27                      7.93	High public attentiveness <i>n</i> = 23                      18.00

<sup>a</sup> Less than mean.<sup>b</sup> Greater than or equal to mean.

Table 4 shows the findings of the regression analysis with respect to the two test variables. The results provide strong support for the first hypothesis—that use of policy analysis will be greater where jurisdiction is competitive. All five jurisdictional variables are significant—three at the 1 percent level. The coefficients of the “referral-type” variables are negative, indicating significantly less use of policy analysis in all other types of referral than in the omitted referral category (sequential—first). Table 5 shows the average number of actual policy analysis citations per case for each of the five referral types. It reveals a pattern consistent with the continuum displayed in Table 2, with more use of policy analysis in jurisdictionally competitive situations.

Support for the second hypothesis is somewhat less strong. The public attentiveness variable is significant at the 10-percent level. Where public attentiveness is high, policy analysis use by legislative committees is greater. Table 6 shows the nature of public attentiveness more directly. The lower right cell shows that cases with the highest level of public attentiveness had the highest average use of analysis.

## CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF POLICY ANALYSIS

This article posed a paradox: Why does our society continue to invest heavily in policy analysis amid consensus that analysis is not used? Through theoretical argument and empirical analysis I have suggested that a resolution lies in a new understanding of policy analysis. From a nontraditional, interpretive perspective, I conclude that analysis is, in fact, used extensively. My view belies the pessimism of many critics of the current state of the profession.

In "The End of Policy Analysis," David Kirp [1992] practically sounds the death knell for policy analysis but stops short of recommending any changes, placing the blame squarely on the shoulders of policymakers. Kirp laments "the retreat from analysis in public life." He attributes this retreat to "deep, structural, and permanent" changes in American politics and policy "that are abidingly hostile to the possibilities of analysis." We have, according to Kirp, witnessed the "triumph of the postmodern sensibility in the domain of policy," which favors anecdotes over policy substance, pessimism over the incrementalist's optimism, passion over reason, and media sound bites over reasoned political discourse. In Kirp's view, policy analysis, as traditionally conceived and practiced, has a "proper place in public decisionmaking," but sadly, one that is not now honored (p. 694).

Echoing this theme some four years later, Terry Davies [1996], director of Resources for the Future's Center for Risk Management, complains that "the value of objective policy analysis, especially in the U.S. Congress, is falling almost as fast as the exchange value of the U.S. dollar..." More defiant than Kirp, Davies seems intent that policymakers should be force-fed policy analysis in spite of their "know nothing approach to policy" (p. 1). In a "Message from the Director" in the Center's Winter 1996 *Newsletter* Davies asserts that:

[T]he Center for Risk Management is committed to the propositions that policymakers and citizens are better off knowing the facts and that the consequences of policy initiatives should be examined before the policies are enacted. Unlike some other institutions, we do not think that a catchy anecdote is a substitute for in-depth policy analysis. (p. 1)

Although Davies gives lip service to postmodernism with his acknowledgment that there is no such thing as purely objective research, he asserts that "within these constraints, we are committed to searching for the truth. . . ." (p. 1). He concludes with the promise to forge ahead, regardless of the demand for the work products of his staff:

The value others attach to our work will fluctuate, but we adhere to a faith that there will always be a place for knowledge and information, even in times of radical change. (p. 1)

Another set of critiques of traditional policy analysis argues that new forms of policy analysis must be devised to remedy the deficiencies of the traditional form. This view sees the lack of demand for the product as an indication that the product needs to change. Two types of deficiencies of traditional policy analysis are usually presented—an overreliance on a positivist framework and an antidemocratic tendency. A certain consensus appears to be taking shape about some of the possible forms a new policy analysis would take—all generally prescribing greater participation by the analyst with those potentially affected by the policies under consideration. Dan Durning [1993] offers a four-part typology of "participatory policy analysis" calling for various degrees of shared responsibility between analysts and citizens (or "stakeholders") for generating information and turning it into advice. Each would involve a greater or

lesser degree of transformation in the analyst's role.

White [1994] offers another typology, describing three revisionist views of policy analysis, each responding in its own way to the challenge posed by Thomas Kuhn's [1962] claim that all bodies of knowledge are "theory laden." All three emphasize the need for discourse in the analytical enterprise, as a means to interpret the plurality of values and arguments available to any policy issue.

The critiques and accompanying prescriptions for a reinvented policy analysis place heavy new demands on the policy analyst as well as on our political institutions. Many of these demands are highly unrealistic and are acknowledged as such even by their proponents. These difficulties may explain the attitudes of Kirp [1992] and Davies [1996]—it is improbable that political "outsiders" can become equal partners in political debate with experts and "insiders," and that social scientists can shed their value predispositions and become equally able to present competing worldviews. Perhaps it is more likely that attitudes valuing traditional analysis will simply resurface.

In my view, none of these radical changes is necessary. As interesting as our politics might be with the kinds of changes outlined by proponents of participatory and critical policy analysis, we do not need these changes to justify our investment in policy analysis. Policy analysis *already* involves discourse, introduces ideas into politics, and affects policy outcomes. The problem is not that policymakers refuse to understand the value of traditional policy analysis or that policy analysts have not learned to be properly interactive with stakeholders and reflective of multiple and nontechnocratic perspectives. The problem, in my view, is only that policy analysts, policymakers, and observers alike do not recognize policy analysis for what it is. Policy analysis has changed, right along with the policy process, to become the provider of ideas and frames, to help sustain the discourse that shapes citizen preferences, and to provide the appearance of rationality in an increasingly complex political environment. Regardless of what the textbooks say, there does not need to be a client in order for ideas from policy analysis to resonate through the policy environment.<sup>10</sup>

Certainly there is room to make our politics more inclusive. But those critics who see policy analysis as a tool of the power elite might be less concerned if they understood that analysts are only adding to the debate—they are unlikely to be handing ready-made policy solutions to elite decisionmakers for implementation. Analysts themselves might be more contented if they started appreciating the appropriation of their ideas by the whole gamut of policy participants and stopped counting the number of times their clients acted upon their proposed solutions. And the cynics disdainful of the purported objectivism of analysis might relax if analysts themselves would acknowledge that they are seeking not truth, but to elevate the level of debate with a compelling, evidence-based presentation of their perspectives. Whereas critics call, unrealistically in my view, for analysts to present competing perspectives on an issue or to "design a discourse among multiple perspectives," I see no reason why an individual analyst must do this when multiple perspectives are already in abundance, brought by multiple analysts. If we would acknowledge that policy analysis does not occur under a private, contractual process whereby hired hands advise only their clients, we would not worry that clients get only one perspective.

Policy analysis *is* used, far more extensively than is commonly believed. Its use

<sup>10</sup> The breadth of analysis that was cited in the House committee reports convinces me that we are well beyond the client-analyst model, even as that model continues to be taught in graduate schools. The ideas of an army of analysts from universities, think tanks, lobby groups, executive branch offices, state and local governments, and elsewhere found their way into the rooms and halls of Congress, whether or not there was any immediate "client" who found use for the analysis.

could be appreciated and expanded if policymakers, citizens, and analysts themselves began to present it more accurately, not as a comprehensive, problem-solving, scientific enterprise, but as a contributor to informed discourse. For years Lindblom [1965, 1968, 1979, 1986, 1990] has argued that we should understand policy analysis for the limited tool that it is—just one of several routes to social problem solving, and an inferior route at that. Although I have learned much from Lindblom on this odyssey from traditional to interpretive policy analysis, my point is different. Lindblom sees analysis as having a very limited impact on policy change due to its ill-conceived reliance on science and its deluded attempts to impose comprehensive rationality on an incremental policy process. I, with the benefit of recent insights of Baumgartner, Jones, and others into the dynamics of policy change, see that even with these limitations, policy analysis can have a major impact on policy. Ideas, aided by institutions and embraced by citizens, can reshape the policy landscape. Policy analysis can supply the ideas.

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## APPENDIX

**Table A.1.** Example of policy analysis use from committee report 99-336, Labor-Management Notification and Consultation Act of 1985.

Source of analysis (full citations are often not provided in the committee report)	Point of citation
House Committee on Small Business, "Conglomerate Mergers—Their Effects on Small Business and Local Communities," 1980	Conglomerate corporations, because they lack local community ties and loyalties, are far likelier than other businesses to shut down or relocate facilities.
A Brookings Institution study of manufacturing plant closings from 1978–1982	During a recession, the rate of disinvestment accelerates and the number of plant closings and cutbacks soars.
A study published by the Public Research Institute of the Center for Naval Analysis	Workers under the age of 40 experienced a 13.4 percent drop in average earnings in the year after closure relative to the year before closure. Workers over the age of 40 suffered a 39.9 percent reduction.
Study by Professor Barry Bluestone, director of the Social Welfare Institute at Boston College, of New England United Auto Workers	Victims of plant closings suffer severe financial losses. Half of the displaced workers were still unemployed 27 months after they lost their jobs.
Louis Jacobson's study of plant closing victims	Financial losses of plant closing victims persist long after they find new jobs. Six years after a closing, the average worker in the steel, meat packing, automobile, and aerospace industries earned 12 to 8 percent less than before the shutdown.
Bureau of Labor Statistics survey of displaced workers	Documents continued joblessness or reduced earnings of displaced workers one to five years later.
Study by Charles Craypo, professor of Labor and Industrial Relations at Cornell University, and William Davidson, professor of economics at the University of Notre Dame, of effects of brewery closing on its 233 production workers	Mortality rate for the displaced workers was 16 times greater than the comparable rate for males having the same age distribution.
Study by Dr. M. Harvey Brenner for the Joint Economic Committee	Studied relationship between unemployment and premature mortality, finding that unemployment causes death by murder, alcoholism, cardiovascular disease, and—most directly—suicide
Dr. Sidney Cobb and Dr. Stanislav Kasl	Seven-year longitudinal study of plant closing victims found their suicide rate to be 30 times greater than normal.
1978 Report to the Federal Trade Commission	Displaced workers find it difficult to adjust to new employment, with the emotional and psychological effects being especially severe for the over-40 worker.
Joseph Cipparone, University of Michigan <i>Journal of Law Reform</i>	The adverse effects of a plant closure usually are not limited to the displaced workers and their families. The community suffers too. Local businesses lose profits, which causes more lost jobs. As people leave to find jobs, property values decline.
Analysis by University of Michigan's Industrial Development Division	The shutdown of the McLouth Steel Corporation would have cost the state and local governments, and school systems an estimated \$11 million in lost taxes.
Ananconda, Montana, Chamber of Commerce survey of 36 local firms	Documents impact of plant closure on unemployment, food stamp rolls, other business layoffs, and business activity.
Studies by Professors Gary Hansen of Utah State University and Nancy Folbre of the University of Massachusetts	Documents the practices of corporations in failing to provide notice to employees of impending closure.
Bureau of Labor Statistics survey of displaced workers, January 1984	Documents that one-half of 11.4 million workers displaced between 1979 and 1984 received no advanced notice and did not expect the layoff.
Another Bureau of Labor Statistics Report	Fewer than 20 percent of union employees are protected by a contractual requirement that the employer give advance notice of a plant shutdown.